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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship among peer status, family status, and self-concept of 184 kindergarten children from 10 classes in a mid-sized mid-south city. Self-concept data was collected using the Woolner Preschool Self-Concept Picture Test, and popularity data was collected using a peer-nomination procedure. Teachers provided information on family structure, with four structures identified for the study: child residing with both parents; child residing with one birth parent; child residing with one birth parent and one step-parent; and other types. Analysis showed that all four family types were found within the sample, although more than half of the children lived with both birth parents. No differences were found in self-concept score by sex, nor were there differences in peer popularity by sex. Informal analysis revealed no relationship between low self-concept and isolate peer status, and no relationship between children of divorced parents and isolate status. (MM)

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PUBLIC SCHOOL KINDERGARTNERS: ISOLATES, LOW SELF-CONCEPT, AND FAMILY STATUS

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Abstract

Young children have basic social needs which must be met in order to develop a healthy sense of self. The family serves as the primary socializing agent while the school setting serves as the secondary socializing agent for young children. This study examined the relationship among peer status, family status, and self-concept. The sample consisted of 184 children from ten different kindergarten classes. The Woolner Preschool Self-Concept Picture Test was used to collect self-concept data. Peer popularity data was collected using a peer-nomination procedure. Family structure information was collected from the teacher. All four family structures were found within the sample. Independent t-tests revealed no differences in self-concept score by sex, nor differences in peer popularity by sex. Analysis of variance procedures were used to analyze differences in self-concept score and peer popularity score means when using family structure as the independent variable. Several implications for kindergarten education appear to be evident from the data.

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Rationale

Throughout this decade many changes in society and family have and will impact young children's growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1985; Elkind, 1984; Umansky, 1983). "We have witnessed a rise in single-parent homes, divorce, blended families, and working mothers, as well as a decline in extended family homes and the birth rate" (Isenberg, 1987, p. 343).

Another critical agent of socialization is provided by peer groups (Isenberg, 1987). More and more children attend formal schools (public school kindergarten) and are engaged in formal group activities (even in preschool) which are organized and maintained by adults.

The importance of self-concept to present and future functioning has been well-documented throughout the literature (see Harter, 1983). Also documented is the changing face of the family; more children will be living in "non-traditional" structures throughout the 1990's (NCFR, 1989). Elkind (1986) and Frost (1986) investigated the relationship between these family structures and the child's social development.

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Washington and Oyemade (1985) also discussed responses to this issue.

The relationship between family structure and self-concept has been investigated; however, the research has generally focused upon older children (e.g.: Hoelter and Harper, 1987; Smith, 1990).

The authors (Grymes and Lawler, 1990) previously investigated the relationship between family structure, self concept, and peer interactions of kindergarten children, specifically. The previous study used the Woolner Preschool Self-Concept Picture Test (Woolner, 1966) to measure self-concept, and a peer nomination procedure (classroom sociogram) to identify peer interactions.

The results of the study indicated that, for kindergartners, there was no relationship between family structure, self-concept, or peer interactions. However, results indicated that 33 of the 92 children participating had low self concepts as measured by Woolner's (1966) Preschool Self-Concept Picture Test. Nine were identified as isolates using the peer nomination process. The authors believe that classroom environment can play an important role in ameliorating such outcomes.

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This previously discussed study, conducted by the authors using the same population and methods, indicated no relationship between current family status and the self-concepts and better peer relations than children from other family types. The authors purposed to replicate the original study with a larger sample size, in order to ascertain if a relationship among kindergarten children's family status, self-concept and peer relations existed.

Research Question

Does a relationship exist among kindergarten children's current family status (residing with both parents, one birth parent only, one birth parent and a step-parent, or other types) and the child's self-concept (as measured by the Woolner Preschool Self-Concept Picture Task) and/or the child's peer status (as measured by a kindergarten by a kindergarten classroom sociogram)? While this question has often been investigated with older children, it has rarely been addressed with preschool-aged children.

Methodology

One-hundred eighty-four (100 males, 84 females) kindergarten children were interviewed from ten different kindergarten classes in a mid-sized mid-south city. All kindergarten children from the district

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attended the same kindergarten center, so a mixture of socio-economic backgrounds was assured.

Teachers and children participated on voluntary basis. Teachers allowed examiners to come into the classroom and collect self-concept data using the Woolner Preschool Self-Concept Picture Test. Each child was interviewed using a peer-nomination procedure to determine peer status within classes. The examiners were the first author and a graduate student, both trained in administering the measures.

Family structure information was collected from the teacher. Four family structures were identified for the purposes of the study. The child's family status was identified as being: 1) with both birth parents; 2) with one birth parent (typically single mother, divorced, not remarried); 3) with one birth parent and a stepparent; and 4) other (typically grandparents or other relatives).

Analysis

Analysis of variance procedures were used to analyze differences in either self-concept score or peer popularity score means using family structure type as the independent variable. Analysis suggested that family structure accounted for no significant amount of variance. For Self-concept score, $F = 1.54$, Peer popularity, $F = 2.44$.

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Informal analysis revealed that there was no relationship between low self-concept and isolate status. In addition, there appeard to be no relationship between children of divorced parents and isolate status.

Thirty-one isolate children were identified. Eleven children with low self-concept were identified. Only three children were identified as isolates with low self-concepts. Within the isolate group, there appears to be no relationship between sex and peer status, nor between race and peer status.

Findings

All four family structures were found within the sample, although more than half of the children lived with both birth parents (58%). Children in single parent families accounted for 29% of the sample, and remarried and other types accounted for 8% and 5%, respectively.

Most of the children exhibited a positive and consistent self-concept, although scores did range from -10 to 10.

Peer popularity scores ranged from 0, indicating no one chose the child, to 13, indicating the child was chosen by 13 other children.

Implications

Several implications for kindergarten classrooms appear to be evident from the data. First, it is typical

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for kindergarten curricula to address the issue of variation among family structures. Possibly, more emphasis should be placed upon how all these family structures are similar rather than different. A second implication underscores the importance of socialization in the early childhood setting. Although there seems to be no relationship between self-concept and peer status, nor family status and peer status, isolates were identified. It appears that teachers should strive to promote acceptance and interaction between and among all kindergartners within their classrooms.

Both of these outcomes, emphasizing family similarities and promoting acceptance and interaction, are the basis of an anti-bias, multi-cultural curriculum. Inservice training promoting such a curriculum, then, may assist in these efforts. Inservice training alone, however; will not change a teacher's attitude or disposition. Fundamentally, it is the teacher's attitude and disposition which will foster a classroom environment which facilitates positive peer relations and self-concepts.

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